

Organizing minors: The case of Colombia

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Introduction

Why do minors join non-state armed organizations? Practitioners and researchers have thoroughly examined an ample set of push factors that range from poverty to the provision of weapons. It can reasonably be conjectured, though, that both pull factors and the interaction between push and pull also play a crucial role.

This paper builds on the notion that organizations are precisely such a factor –probably the main one¹. Organizations are a reference point in the regions in which they have influence, develop role models that relate directly to the imagination of the dwellers, and create structures that become real life alternatives. They not only recruit actively, but also shape in a quite distinct way the experience of the minors that actually decide to join an armed group. Thus, they represent distinct life paths for them. In particular, it can be conjectured that:

- a. Different organizations target different population pools
- b. They also attract people with divergent motivations.
- c. Hold disparate organizational routines
- d. Foster a distinct set of values
- e. Thus expose the minors that join them to crucially diverse experiences

Some of these propositions may seem quite obvious (at least c., d. and e.), but they are only rarely acknowledged by the literature. The role of organizations has been neglected for several reasons. The primary one is that the contemporary mainstream theories and perspectives on war tend to gloss over organizational differences between illegal armed groups. The new wars

perspective --that has been adopted by several governments, international agencies and NGO's-- has the "isomorphism hypothesis" as one of its main tenets. According to it, one of the central characteristics of new wars is the blending of the criminal and the political, and all the competing armed groups are expression of this unique process (Kaldor, 2001). The following quote is illustrative: "Modern conflict...challenges the very distinction between war and peace. It takes place typically not between armies, or even between an army of a state and its armed opposition in some easily defined guerrilla movement. The forces of both government and opposition, from Cambodia to Colombia, blend into illicit business and organized crime" (Edmund Cairns, quoted in Azam: 2002, 131). Practitioners are intent on building criticisms that are morally balanced (a worthy intention if there is one) but this implies stressing factors like forced recruitment and the basic identity between all warlords --which can lead to the adoption of the isomorphism hypothesis as a central common-sense assumption. If the organizational structures of all rebel or paramilitary groups are a constant, they lose a significant part of their practical interest.

On the theoretical side, the main tools and concepts presently available do not lend themselves easily to the systematic study of *these* organizations. Rational choice analyses focus on finding laws of behavior that would explain why utility maximizers join some standard illegal, "terrorist", criminal, or "rebel" organization (Su Kin Chai, 1993). Until now, they have found that differences between organizations are at a too high level of resolution to deserve treatment --actually, the pieces that face seriously the crucial variable of organizational structures are alarmingly few (among these see for example Gates, 2002). The powerful tools of moral hazard and principal-agent models are relevant here, and indeed several typical governance tensions that all armies face might be expressed through those themes. "Win or lose, the concepts through which a commander and his chronicler approach a battle—are by no means the

same of those through which his men will view the involvement in it. Their view, like that of all human beings confronted with the threat or reality of extreme personal danger, will be a [very]...simple one: it will centre on the issue of personal survival, to which the commander's "win/lose" system of values may be, indeed often proves, irrelevant or directly hostile" (Keegan, 2004; 47). But it seems that even when such tools suggest themselves as the "natural" lenses to attack the problem of military organization, an effort of translation (from markets to coercion, from legal to illegal activities, etc.) is needed. Principal-agent models assume the existence of independent tribunals to resolve distributional disputes, and a contractual system based on monetary incentives, all of which empirically may be very weak or inexistent among rebel armies or paramilitary forces. Until now, though, the military excursus of the *homo economicus* (Cramer, 2002) has thus far treated the battle field as if it were a market (Collier and Hoeffler 1998; Collier,2000) –which rather oddly implies building an explanation lacking any sensible microfoundations (Gutiérrez, 2004), and indeed disregarding organizational factors. Is it, once again, a "case of excessive ambition" (Elster, 2000)?

The specifics of *these* soldiers (minors) can not be captured either with rational choice tools –the primary evidence of this being that hardly any rationalist paper (to my knowledge) has seriously confronted the issue². Developmental psychologists have long ago suggested that there may be fundamental differences between the mind and type of reasoning of adults and children³. Children indeed make decisions, but how? The link between objectives and means may be weaker; beliefs may be fuzzier, etc.. This also applies to moral decisions and awareness. A core point of the humanitarian critique to the recruitment of minors is that they are not full moral personalities, and thus they can be lured into criminal practices without being fully conscious of what they are doing. They are not exactly deciding, in the sense an adult does⁴. And indeed:

what does it mean that a child voluntarily joined an army? Being forced at gun point and actually wanting to be a member is quite different—no sentimental demagoguery should obscure this point. At the same time, there is also a difference between being 14 years old and *deciding* to be a guerrilla, and doing the same 6 years later—or at least it is reasonable to conjecture that there is⁵. Rational choice analyses—which, despite several substantial improvements, deal with genderless, ageless and classless entities—, do not seem prepared to grasp such types of differences.

In sum, in this terrain rational choice can provide very valuable insights but encounters two limits: dealing with beings whose autonomy and decision making capacity is limited and tightly bounded by their social entourage⁶; and figuring out organizations that are complex governance structures but lack clear apportioning rules and can not resort to independent tribunals to settle differences (and thus do not allow for the establishment of contracts proper). I believe the narrower version of rational choice—the *homo economicus* rendering of violent conflict—lives in a “cognitive, motivational, and institutional vacuum” (Albert, 1997), losing all the specifics of war as a concrete human activity – and, a fortiori, of the role of minors in it. The symmetrically inverse problem is the tendency of several authors to deny child combatants any kind of agency (Honwana, 2006), vindicating their primordial innocence but completely losing the social mechanisms that pushed them, and not others, into the conflict. In these renderings, the most asphyxiating versions of the *homo sociologicus* tend to be the default template. Do we have to choose between the Scylla of portraying children as heroic victims devoid of any will and cravings, and the Charibdis of seeing them as small adults, abstract entities that maximize, as anybody else, some kind of utility function? If we are to escape the dilemma, we must return to the basics, and make some elementary queries. Two questions seem particularly pertinent:

- a. Why do organizations go after children? Prima facie, recruiting minors does not seem such a good business for an irregular force. Children can be undisciplined, their body and psychology are not prepared for the sustained hardships of war, they do not stand a chance when confronting an adult force. Indeed, there are horror stories about gory initiations of minors all around the world, for example into the LRA in Uganda, seeking to transform them into bloodthirsty butchers. But such narratives show as well that the LRA is an extremely inept group, at least in purely military terms. When a rebel force needs a modicum of technical expertise, why should it enlist children? This would not be such a serious puzzle if, as Collier assumes, taking power and fighting is actually not an objective of the rebels. They are not armies but rent seekers. Collier's blithe assumption, however, does not hold in Colombia⁷. There is quite a bit of fighting activity going on, and actually it has increased both in absolute terms and in regards to other forms of violence. This applies with particular force to the main guerrilla, the FARC, a point that is corroborated by governmental reports, which show that the risk of being killed in the guerrilla is quite high (Pinto, Vergara, La Huerta, Percipiano, 2002), and that in the last four years the combat activity of the FARC has risen sharply. The FARC is indeed a rent seeker; but it is also an army⁸, that has to solve all the technical issues armies face. So the problem remains. Why does it make sense to recruit minors?
- b. Why do children join organizations? Both Colombian and international evidence suggest that a very high percentage of children enlist voluntarily⁹. In Colombia, it may be the case that no more than 20% of the minors are forced at gun point into the groups (see Table 1). So why are they willing to risk their lives, and (many a times) those of their relatives¹⁰? In their excellent study, Brett and Specht (2005) remind their readers that

children get involved in war because war exists –precisely since this is such an obvious factor it is frequently glossed over. The point is strong, indeed, but it certainly does not explain some of their cases¹¹ nor does it address the age specificity issue. We are troubled about the presence of minors in armies because we feel that they should be doing other things instead of fighting. Are we wrong? Why can children adapt (if they do) to the extremely hostile environment of war? The treatment of the issue in Colombia is complicated by the high presence of female combatants in the FARC, ranging from 20 to 30% according to available evidence. There are some motivations in youths that seem to be gender specific in many cultures (the allure of guns, for example; Brett and Specht, 2005). In many peasant societies girls are raised to organize domestic life, not to participate in the most strenuous and risky forms of public engagement. If girls in some cultures are relatively immune to certain motivations, and are not educated for war, why do they populate the FARC ranks so heavily?

Putting both questions together: How do child and organization characteristics interact? We know practically nothing about this. However, it seems a crucial dimension both for prevention and reinsertion. “Raw” children are not very useful for war –the younger the worse. Groups have to transform them into warriors. A quite natural hypothesis in this regard is that such process of transformation is heavily colored by the nature of the respective group.

This paper attempts to respond to the two basic questions enumerated above, based on a case study (Colombia). Naturally, case studies have limits (generalization), but at the same time strong points (context-sensitive analyses; the capacity of capturing mechanisms in movement). I begin by sketching the basics of the Colombian conflict. I present first a chronology, and then a brief discussion of the role of gender and age in our conflict. The second part is dedicated to the

“Why do groups recruit children?” question. The main answer it offers is that, regarding minors, the FARC has to solve a tension between a “Napoleonic bound” and a “Napoleonic drive”. The third part sketches some crucial organizational differences between the groups that act in the Colombian war; it contains basic knowledge for the subsequent discussion. The fourth one focuses on the “Why do children join groups?” interrogation. It shows that the “greedy warrior” hypothesis has poor explanatory power in the Colombian context. At the same time, it tends to confirm results of other researchers, both concerning minors and adults (Honwana, 2006; Brett and Specht, 2005; Pinto, Vergara, La Huerta, Percipiano 2002; Gutiérrez, 2004). I emphasize motives related to age. I discuss some of the specifics of the motivations of minors in the Colombian conflict, and the way they can explain differential recruitment by armed groups in Colombia. In particular, I offer some preliminary explanations for the following problem: the FARC appears to offer by large the worse system of incentives to potential recruits, but it is the most successful force (in organizational terms), and by large the one that has the largest stock of (voluntary¹²) child soldiers.

I use several sources, including governmental reports and data bases, judicial proceedings field work, in depth interviews and other oral testimonies, and the press.

The context: the Colombian conflict

Chronology

Students and practitioners differ as to the origin of the Colombian conflict. Some have asserted that there has been a continuous state of violence in the country from 1940 until today. My own vision is that there have been two distinct waves of confrontation, one that started by the

late 1940s and concluded in the early 60s, and another one that began only in the late 1970s and has lasted until today. Though they are linked¹³, I am concerned here with the latter one.

Indeed, Colombia –like many other Latin American countries—had revolutionary guerrillas in the 1960s, but their role was quite marginal. They were very small groups waging an “imaginary war” (Broderick’s apt description, 2000). For example the FARC, that for decades has been the main guerrilla, had no more than 780 combatants in 1978 (Ferro & Uribe, 2002; see Table 2, that briefly describes some of the main denominations that have participated in the conflict in the last 40 years). The FARC had little influence in national politics, and the other groups –Castroist ELN and Maoist EPL, among others—were even smaller and more vulnerable. The ELN was practically wiped out in the Anorí operation in 1973.

In the early 1970’s, though, a new guerrilla appeared of nationalist hue: the M-19. Contrary to its predecessors, it was capable of “nationalizing the war”; this, plus the very fast and strong development of the narco-economy in the second half of the 1970’s pushed the problem of widespread violence to the center stage of political life. If the M19 was the great innovator of the Colombian conflict, the guerrilla that was most favored by the hike in its intensity was the FARC. In the 1980’s a full fledged internal conflict was being fought in the country, with some extremely brutal events taking place. The guerrillas became deeply involved in the narco-economy, but also in a wide range of criminal economic activities, the main one being kidnapping. Counter-insurgents responded in kind (though with their own idiosyncratic repertoire). The Colombian government claimed that an explicit alliance between *narcos* and *guerrilleros* had taken place¹⁴. Certainly, in the second half of the 1980’s the narcotraffickers had declared a terrorist war against the state. This other war was waged planting bombs in the country’s main cities, blowing up a plane full of passengers, kidnappings (more often than not

followed by assassinations), and shooting state officials, policemen and politicians, among others. But while attacking the state, narcos were also enthusiastically funding paramilitary groups.

In the meantime, the paramilitaries were growing even faster than the guerrillas. Following the standard strategy of such groups in Latin America, to “dry the pond” so as to be able to “catch the fish”¹⁵, they exercised systematic terror against civilians. They routinely massacred the peasant population, triggering huge displacement waves. The paramilitary groups expressed a de facto coalition in the field that included army officers, cattle ranchers, agro-industrialists and big time criminals (Gutiérrez and Barón, 2005; see also Medina, 1991 and Romero, 2002). Their murderous activities continued during the 1990’s, probably achieving a peak in the 1998-2002 administration, when they carried out an offensive against civilians through quotidian massacres to create a climate of terror and sabotage the peace talks between the FARC and the government. From 2004 on, however, the paramilitary are in a process of demobilization, though as different academics and independent observers have observed, they are a deeply criminalized force.

The Colombian war has ranged from low to medium intensity (Pizarro, 2004). Perhaps – for classificatory purposes—it is more helpful to observe that, contrary to the first wave of Colombian violence, this one has not caused a massive civilian polarization (Posada Carbó, 2006). More precisely, the overwhelming majority of the Colombian population strongly rejects both the guerrilla and the paramilitary, and condemns some of their main criminal practices. There is evidence of long social networks associated with some of the practices of those groups (Gutiérrez and Barón, 2005), but the war does not divide the population in more or less equivalent politicized rival portions.

Age and gender in the Colombian conflict

If the Colombian conflict has evolved, the conceptions of role and gender in it have changed as well. The Colombian state incorporated minors in its ranks –both in combat and desk activities--, but the 1991 Constitution gave child defenders the tools and the arguments to exert strong pressure against such practice. After several ups and downs, it was banished, but some analysts maintain that it has been revived in different forms. Something similar can be said about the penal status of minors. There are two types of legal pressures in this regard. On the one hand, a liberal trend: Colombia has engaged in international agreements that demand special treatment for child offenders. On the other, a pragmatic one, that argues that the legal unaccountability of minor offenders has become an incentive for their recruitment by criminal or subversive groups, and a real problem for anti-crime policies. The debate has resurfaced cyclically in recent years.

The guerrillas have had their own trajectory. By the mid 1960's the ELN was a very small, wholly male and probably adult force. It was famous for its *machismo*, and its commanders reserved themselves the right of picking out women from the (very small) peasant base that sympathized with it (Medina Gallego, 1996). Clearly, this was an affair of youngsters, which is natural if it is taken into account that this was a force composed of university students and peasants that joined the labor market very early (see the narrative of the commander Nicolás Bautista “Gabino” in Medina, 1996). However, it does not seem to have been massive, as the extreme hardships, ideologization and marginal character of the ELN, summed to its brutal internal purges, were not a friendly environment for minor participation. Not only was it a fragile experience: also, it was simply not fun¹⁶. The ELN ranks were populated by peasants and university students, and at least the latter were mainly young adults. When, after the Anorí

debacle it was rebuilt in the 1980's, the ELN had suffered a deep transformation. The blood baths due to internal conflicts disappeared, doctrinarism relaxed, resources –due to kidnapping and, eventually, rent extraction from the mining economy¹⁷—increased by several orders of magnitude, and volunteers joined their ranks in large numbers¹⁸. This process probably feminized the ELN, and lowered its age averages.

The FARC has deep roots in the previous cycle of violence: its immediate antecedent was a peasant self defense group, initially composed of Liberal families¹⁹ that escaped the Conservative government harassment and fell under communist influence. At the beginning, they were more of a roaming community than a guerrilla proper (Jacobo Arenas, w.d.). They were an association of households, with women dedicated to domestic labor and raising of children, and the men switching between cultivating the land and fighting. Some children participated in combat²⁰. The familial structure was technically not sustainable, and when the FARC was formally created in 1966 it had already become much more guerrilla-type. As stated above, despite its grand discourses—past and present--, it was very marginal. By 1978, it had – according to its own reports (Ferro and Uribe, 2002)—no more than 800 members, and acted in removed and very poor territories (Vélez, 1999). At the same time, it was much more efficient and result-driven than its counterparts. I also believe it was subject to a much earlier process of feminization than any other Colombian irregular force, perhaps due to its family based origin. Then the FARC made two crucial decisions. In 1978, after a strong internal debate, it agreed to participate in the coca economy, first as a –rather timid—regulator, after in a full blown fashion (Ferro and Uribe, 2002). And in 1982, it declared itself a popular army (FARC-Ejército del Pueblo) and sketched a strategic plan for the next years, which it approximately accomplished, at least until the mid 1990s. As in the case of the ELN, the FARC received from the early 1980's

on a sustained stream of supporters. Based on governmental reports about casualties and desertions of the FARC, and taking into account that in the last two decades it rose to a membership of between 15 and 20,000, and more or less has maintained that level, it seems reasonable to conjecture that in that period it has accepted between 3 and 5 000 members each year. This is quite impressive, taking into account the idiosyncrasies of the FARC (cfr. *infra*) but also the fact that its mass base is weak. Opinion polls and other evidence attest to a strong rejection of the FARC in Colombian public opinion.

As stated above, of that flow a huge percentage, between 20 and 30%, are women²¹ that participate directly in combat, and minors. Women are very important in the FARC, but they hit a crystal ceiling; their presence at the higher ranks is scarce. Minors may account for up to 40% of the FARC. For example, almost half of the respondents of Table 1 joined the guerrilla when they were younger than 17 years old. The FARC leaders have stated explicitly that it will not stop enlisting them (Ferro and Uribe, 2002).

The paramilitaries were created in the 1980s as death squads, but sometimes not devoid of a social base (for the early experience of the Magdalena Medio, see Medina Gallego, 1990; Gutiérrez and Barón, 2005). A sector of its leadership strived to transform this cloud of localist, heterogeneous units into a national antsubversive army. By 1997 a national federation, the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, was formed. But the original project –evolve towards an army like structure—was unfeasible; centrifugal forces were too strong (Gutiérrez and Barón, 2005). In 2002 the federation was dismantled, and in 2004 it started a negotiation process with the government. As a whole, the paramilitary are a male, paid force, in which social and military hierarchy overlap, with a shorter organizational ladder to climb, and much laxer discipline. Women –possibly many of them ex-guerrillas (Lara, 2000)—appear occasionally as social

activists, but there is strong evidence that in military activities proper they appear in significantly less proportion than in the guerrillas (see for example Table 6). Regarding minors, the situation seems rather complicated –and woefully understudied. There have been journalistic reports about massive abductions of children by paramilitary groups, especially in the south of the country, but we know little about the magnitude and stability of the practice. In the reinsertion process only few minors appeared, but this may respond to a conscious legitimizing strategy. It must be remembered, additionally, that the paramilitary operate on very lax networking principles. Openly criminal groups, that engage voluntarily scores of children, swarm at the outskirts of these networks. Do they belong to the paramilitary proper? It is hard to tell. Subjectively, a portion of children that owe allegiance to such gangs appear to believe that they are paramilitary cadres as well. With all these caveats, I believe that in the core of the force there are fewer children under the banner of the paramilitary than in the guerrilla. But why should one or the other be interested in recruiting minors anyway?

Why children?

Preliminary vignettes

In January 2001, the Colombian press reported that the Army had finished the “Berlin operation”, targeted against a FARC column²² –the “columna móvil Arturo Ruiz”—that in a few days had marched rather spectacularly from the south of the country to the northern department of Santander. It was a resounding success for the governmental forces. They mopped up the column, killing and injuring tens of its members and forcing almost all of the others into surrender.

Such a crushing victory is rarely seen in the Colombian conflict, but the event hit the headlines not because of its strategic value but rather because a huge proportion of the members of the Arturo Ruiz column were children. Despite the huge meaning of the incursion, and its financial costs²³, the FARC Secretariat showed it was willing to take its chances with child soldiers. It failed miserably, both in the military and the political sense. Public opinion was outraged by the massive utilization of under age combatants. Few people failed to express their repulsion. All insiders expressed their astonishment: why should a militarily savvy group as the FARC make such a blunder?

There is another side to the story. In national wars, the participation of children (and women) in war has been seen as a sure symptom of mass support, and social inclusion; also indeed as one of the highest forms of heroism. The sentimental juvenile literature classic by Edmundo D' Amicis, written 120 years ago (*Cuore*), with which millions of boys were reared in the 20th Century, is the hagiography of the fortitude of children that are ready to offer their lives for the sake of Lombardy. This nationalist lullaby is only one example of a very long thread, that still manifests itself quite vigorously today. For example, in his recount of the Nicaraguan revolution, the poet Ernesto Cardenal focuses on one important event, the insurrection of Monimbó, claiming proudly: “Boys played a very important role in the insurrection” (Cardenal, 1999: 70). “Adolescents and children –he continues—also fought in that war. I hear that one was shooting with a pistol, and when it broke he started to cry. Humble old women with their *ponchos* went from house to house with baskets distributing homemade [*de contacto*] bombs. Women threw boiling water from the roofs on the heads of the guards” (Cardenal, 1999: 63). A man offers his testimony in the following terms: “I have seen young lads defending a position to allow the others to escape. And they knew that they were going to die. Brother! Now I

understand what it is to be Christian” (Cardenal, 1999: 123). Further on, a child declares, with the obvious approval of the author “I was recruited by my mom” (131).

Naturally, Colombia is not inconvertible to such tradition. An epitome of national indomitability is early 19th Century Policarpa Salavarrieta, a young woman that sacrificed her life to during the Spanish invasion²⁴. After independence, the participation of children in several of the country’s civil wars –from the two perspectives relevant here: the interest of groups in drafting them, and their will to join—is documented in mountains of testimonial works. For example: **

To summarize: independently of its military value, D’Amicis, Cardenal, and others have felt very strongly that the participation of children and women in organized violent resistance is a huge moral and political victory. It stands for the capacity of the given group to motivate new social layers into the public space, and should terrify its enemy: it is morally difficult, and political costly, to face children and women. This contrasts sharply with the outcome of the Berlin Operation. How can such a huge difference be explained?

The tensions behind the recruitment of minors

If they decide to recruit children, any army faces two types of problems. The first ones are technical. Warfare has always been a young people’s business, but how much so? Concerning drafting age, there is a lower bound that military theorists and practitioners identify easily in each concrete context. The line is to be drawn precisely in the moment in which a child becomes an adult. Napoleon, for example, stated with the utmost clarity: “We need men and not boys. No one is braver than our young people, but lacking fortitude they fill the hospitals and even at the slightest uncertainty they show the character of their age. Eighteen year old boys are too young to wage war...far from home...Being too young, none should be sent to the field army.

Instead, they should remain in France, where they will be clothed, armed, and drilled” (Napoleon, 1999: 2). Note that: a) he did not reject the recruitment of minors, but their participation in combat, and b) when he identified the limits of “boys” qua soldiers he was not referring mainly to the physical hardships of war²⁵, but to their psychological fragility and immaturity.

The second ones are political. In several polities there is the widespread perception that war is an affair of (young) *adult* men. Indeed, the reality may be different; nonetheless the perception is strong. The fact that other demographic categories decide to risk their life, or are pushed into doing so, is a political highlight. Since war is always brutal, involving children and women in war appears as an obvious de-naturalization, a transgression of deep-seated norms about age and gender (Honwana, 2006). In Colombia, the fact that the government has suspended –or at least limited severely—the enlistment of children in the armed forces, and that increasingly such practice is considered a very serious war crime, has sharply aggravated its risks. It is possible that the growing governmental self-restriction regarding minor recruitment has prompted the guerrillas and the paramilitary to establish limits themselves, in an effort to restrict judicial vulnerability and public disrepute. Even so, engaging children in war has justly earned a wealth of criticism and odium from citizens, stakeholders, and civil society spokesmen.

What, then, are the benefits to recruiting children? The question is all the more necessary, given that illegal armed groups, particularly the FARC, still indulge massively in child recruitment. Potentially, there are several, but almost all are problematic –at least when confronted with the empirical data about the Colombian conflict. Precisely because some socio-demographic categories have been historically separated from war, and sometimes are surrounded by special protections, they can have great strategic value. In many wars –including

the Colombian conflict-- children are routinely used as informants and messengers. This does not explain their utilization in combat, which is the focus of this paper, but a first contact as an informant may trigger a process that ends in recruitment proper²⁶. In this version, child enlistment is a by product of child part-time utilization given a system of incentives that favors it (the unaccountability of minors from a legal standpoint. However, the evidence I have at hand – autobiographical recounts, field work by other researchers, press clips, judicial proceedings— suggests that this path is one among many, actually not the most overcrowded. Minors tend to join directly, frequently after a very brief training course (Ferro and Uribe, 2002). Closer to the point may be the malleability of children. Since the motivations to join an armed illegal group are so varied (cfr. section 4 *infra*), the recruits have to be thoroughly transformed into useful soldiers²⁷. Children can be more easily induced into false beliefs before joining, and more easily molded when they have already become members. It may be the case as well that the guerrilla simply has no alternative. A sustainable rebellion has to be able at least to replace its casualties and desertions with a fresh stream of admissions. How can a peasant army like the FARC fulfill this objective? Colombia is a highly urbanized country²⁸, with a hardly viable rural economy and a huge displacement problem (between 2.5 and 8% of its population)²⁹. Furthermore, as stated above, it is intensely rebuked by the majority of the population. So the pool of potential recruits may be small. It might be speculated that the guerrilla prefers any recruit to none and operates according to the principle that one is better than none and incorporating nearly whoever petitions –resulting in very low age average and mixed gender composition. The problem of this explanation is that it is difficult to know if it holds; if anything, the guerrilla recruiters boast that they can allow themselves the luxury of selecting among the hundreds of applications they get

(Ferro and Uribe, 2002). This sounds exaggerated, but not plainly absurd, at least in some regions.

The problem probably should be re-interpreted through the lenses of the interaction between the organizational blueprint and the motivation of the children in a given population. I suggested above that there was a purely technical, military “Napoleonic bound” concerning the recruitment of children: below a certain age they do not fight very well and, even worse, they break down easily. Actually, the FARC has its own limit which it states explicitly: 15 years (Ferro and Uribe, 2002). There is no serious reason for doubting that this limit is more or less respected. For example, in an ICBF database of minors that were captured or deserted between 1999 and 2004 (Table 6), among the more than 1155 FARC entries there are 166 cases, or 14.4%, that reported having joined when they were under 15³⁰. This shows that the 15 years old rule is used implicitly or explicitly in practice³¹. As highlighted by Napoleon’s quote, this is not a normative but a strictly rational behavior. As further seen above, there is a political “Napoleonic drive” as well. Napoleonic wars were national, not only in the sense that they were driven by national themes, but that they aspired to have “universal coverage” and to be “inclusive”. In his time, Napoleon believed this implied adult male enlistment –a mirror of adult male enfranchisement³². Clausewitz argued that such a mass mobilizing strategy was *politically* invincible, and could only be countered by a symmetrically opposed mass mobilization. The ulterior national wars of the 19th and 20th centuries in this sense only pushed the Napoleonic impulse to its logic consequences, increasingly involving more and more socio-demographic categories in the conflict. This applies even to cultures that have deep-seated conceptions about age or gender. Even today, some wars and groups clearly show the imprint of the Napoleonic drive (I would believe that a good example is the LTT in Sri Lanka). So here there seems to be a

tension. In the military sense, the more army like and combat prone the group is, the more it needs real military proficiency to survive. In the political sense, the more army like and nationalistic the more it will tend to include socio-demographic categories different from young male adults. But some of these categories, like children, are not fully endowed to carry on combat activities³³. The FARC has resolved this tension by tracing its own lower bound, and including those new categories as combatants, but not in the leadership, where of course no child but also no woman is to be found. This allows it to broaden the pool of potential recruits, and thus the quality of those who are ultimately chosen. I would conjecture that all this works because of the peculiarities of the new categories: women have more motives to escape than men (cfr. *infra*), and children are more easily victims of false beliefs, have shorter time horizons, and are more vulnerable to peer pressure. In other terms, the FARC is a minority, politically marginal force, but it can resolve the tension both because of the strength of the push factors and its recruitment strategies.

In sum: the answer to the “why children?” question lies in the interaction between the organizational needs of the given group and the characteristics of the population³⁴. For the FARC, the wider the recruitment pool the better: if it has the liberty to choose it can pick better fighters, and can form a reserve disposed to go into action in any moment. On the other hand, it can argue –as it does-- that child recruitment is an act of social inclusion, which unequivocally shows the massive character of its cause (Ferro and Uribe, 2002) At the same time, the recruitment of minors creates real technical problems, that from time to time show up (like in the Berlin operation³⁵). The FARC generally fights with mixed forces –gender and age-wise— which helps assimilate some of the shortcomings of children as warriors³⁶.

Comparing systems of incentives

This section compares the three main illegal organizations that participate in the Colombian war—the FARC, the paramilitaries, and the ELN. The main differences are synthesized in Table 3³⁷. The explicit objective of the FARC is to build a “popular army”. It emphasizes discipline and combat capacity. It has been able to build a strong line of command, which is extremely centralized. Its members do not receive a salary (Gutiérrez, 2004; HRW, 2003, Ferro and Uribe, 2002)³⁸. There is hardly a case of individual looting³⁹ by FARC members, and they do not have access (as individuals) to rents. The FARC members can handle huge resources coming from narcotrafficking and kidnapping, but it is always clear that this money belongs to the organization. From time to time (once or twice a year) a commander escapes with a pot of money. But overwhelmingly, the general rule is that soldiers get their equipment and no more; indeed, a major reason for desertion is the absence of salary (see Table 1 and HRW, 2003).

The FARC internal discipline is extremely harsh. Restrictions are widespread, and a high level of self-sacrifice is demanded from the rank and file. Verticalism and the obsession for control, or simply open arbitrariness, are present in all domains of life. The fighter’s day is meticulously planned, and in all steps of quotidian life it is stressed that the organization’s interests are above those of the individual. For example, superiors can order the separation of well established couples, responding to the imperatives of war or to their own desire of, for example, getting rid of the husband and taking his place (Molano, 2001a). Pregnant women have to abort or to surrender the newborn to a relative. Several transgressions—stealing, raping, looting—are punished with the death penalty. “The Farc-Ep prohibits unruly conduct by its fighters, especially when they are among the civilian population. Robbery, extortion, threats, sexual abuse, and the irresponsible use of firearms can be capital offences” (HRW: 2003, 69). Even petty offenses to FARC’s military regulations, like falling asleep during a night guard, can

produce a tragic outcome. Plausibly, these brutal strictures harm mainly the underage members of the organization.

The FARC is very inward looking. Though it has an ideological life of its own, which should not be ignored, the cement that unites it is much more its strong “organizational culture”, i.e., its capacity of building links between the individual and the organization. Since its combat activity is high, members develop that “platoon solidarity” that is one of the most powerful human gregarious sentiments⁴⁰. But there is much more. Since there is a high percentage of females, couples are formed mainly within the organization⁴¹. FARC members develop all their private and public life in an organizational stage. They develop practices and learn skills that will be useful in the FARC. There is also a coercive element. Deserters are killed. Desertion is perhaps the worse conceivable offence. The official position of the organization is that by joining you make a life-long commitment. And in effect only very, very rarely are allowed to withdraw some members.

Why do people accept all this? FARC officials claim that they always warn potential recruits about the meaning of the step they take when they join the organization (Ferro and Uribe, 2002), but deserters dispute this. Since both sides have a high element of self interest – boost the image of the organization, on the one hand, decline responsibility on the other—it is hard to discern the truth. My own impression is that the FARC creates many false beliefs, or at least allows for their creation, with the hope that after joining the recruit will be transformed into a loyal, resilient soldier. From the point of view of the FARC, the path that shows why is it worthwhile to lie would be the following. The potential recruit (say, A) wants to join because she has wrong beliefs (she thinks that in the FARC she can take revenge against someone, or earn some money). The FARC tells A she will in effect get a salary, so she joins. Then, she

discovers that her beliefs were wrong, but in the meantime (a potentially short period of a few weeks or months) she has been transformed and integrated, so she will not be excessively unhappy. If this method works in a large number of cases, then lying is preferable to abducting or coercing⁴². At the same time, in certain regions the FARC is an attractive alternative in its own right, and receives a steady stream of applications. Its link with the civil society is weak, or rather, almost completely mediated by coercive-regulatory practices (weapons, policing and market regulations). Thus, the FARC accepts children without parental consent, an option that can not be easily implemented by the ELN, for example⁴³.

The distinctive features of each organization are clearly reflected in the recruitment process. All three groups resort to forced recruitment, but this does not account for the bulk of new entries. The FARC leaders provide a very reasonable explanation for their attachment to “free will”: an unwilling soldier is bound to shoot his/her superiors in their backs, and has the ideal conditions to do so in an irregular war (Ferro and Uribe, 2002). The enlistment blueprint of the FARC has three outstanding characteristics. First and foremost, it is a life-engagement. Recruits do not have the right to leave, and this is common knowledge. FARC officers do not miss the opportunity to stress the point,⁴⁴ especially during the 2-3 month trial period before enlistment becomes irreversible. Second, it implies that recruits break their ties with society; “normal life” is left behind. Family contacts are reduced to a minimum for security reasons – and, I suspect, to preserve internal discipline–. Regular contacts with the population are discouraged; they are seen, rightly, as a serious security problem. Indeed, judicial proceedings show that as soon as fighters return to their normal background they engage in practices – drinking, partying-- that make them more vulnerable. Third, it is based on very tight control. As stated above, no salary is paid, gifts from the family pass through the hands of the guerrilla

authorities and at least in theory can be redistributed,⁴⁵ personal objects –especially gold chains and other jewelry -- are confiscated. FARC leaders have an obvious concern about the effect that money may have on discipline and morale.

For different reasons, the ELN and the paramilitary allow much more latitude for the advancement of individual interests. In the past, the ELN killed or threatened deserters, particularly, prominent ones-- but has long abandoned such practice. People can leave and return; a grave offense that FARC members would never permit. Actually, the ELN does not have an outcome that is at least partially deliberate (Medina Gallego, 2003), and its routine is much less military driven than FARC's. It is much more ideological regarding compensation, at least in the conventional sense (Aguilera, 2006). The paramilitaries offer economic selective incentives, and generally do not demand that the fighter leave home; the authorities support or turn a blind eye to the activities of the group, and the local elites back them solidly, so there is no question of starting a new life from scratch, like in the guerrilla, nor of leaving behind the system. Egalitarian rules that seem strong both in the FARC and the ELN seem strong, are non-existent in the paramilitary. Control mechanisms, in sum, are much more lenient than in the guerrilla. At the same time, the probability of bloody internecine feuds is high.

Joining the guerrilla or the paramilitary is risky. This can be examined from three points of view. First, the probability of losing one's life grows sharply after entry. Pinto and his colleagues illustrate this with a simple exercise. They compare the violent death probability of a "typical" non-insurgent Colombian and that of a guerrilla member (in the numerator they put the dead of the respective category; in the denominator, the total count of the category). As seen in Table 4, the result is a 1:70 ratio. Naturally, the actual working ratio may be different: on the one hand, children must be subtracted from the total population's denominator, but at the same

time those engaged in high risk activities (police, military, members of narco-trafficking networks, etc.), whose death toll is also unusually high, should be removed from the numerator. On the other hand, in some regions the risk of “conventional” citizens may be very high, which could be associated with unusually high rates of recruitment⁴⁶; but risk averse people can migrate, which they do massively. All in all, not joining a guerrilla increases your chance of survival between one and two orders of magnitude. Second, the risk has increased. Please note that even though between 2000 and 2002 the FARC and the government held peace talks, the number of casualties grew. Third, the FARC-army casualty ratio is unfavorable to the former (Gutiérrez, 2006); more than one guerrilla member is killed for each soldier, and this is much worse for the ELN⁴⁷. It is not rare that members are killed by members of their own organization, either.

Why war?

A rationalist quandary

Presently, the most accepted interpretation of the motives of guerrilla recruits is still Collier's, along the lines of his famous “greed or grievance” dichotomy. Collier claimed that people joined the guerrilla searching for a job that they did not find in the legal sector. Guerrilla members were the “rebel's workforce”. War, then, offers an economic solution to the leaders (rent-seeking) and to the soldiers (salary). Thus, Collier's identi-kit of the typical illegal armed group member is: male, young, unemployed. I do not believe this description is adequate in general; at any rate, it does not fit the Colombian case.

First, Collier has not taken into account that somebody that has not found employment in the legal market has many options. A non-normative Colombian has many choices if he has

made the decision to work illegally. He can engage in narcotrafficking, which is both more profitable and less risky than a guerrilla. He can become a paramilitary. He can choose one among several guerrillas. Putting all the pieces together, a greedy Colombian can join:

- a. A narcotrafficking network, very profitable business indeed, with a large workforce, very high levels of profit, very risky but probably not so much as the guerrilla.
- b. The paramilitary. The paramilitary salary is above the Colombian minimum salary. The guerrillas do not pay, but instead offer greater levels of risk. The choice between the two is obvious.
- c. The guerrilla, if the employment seeker is irrational. But the ELN offers a safer environment. At least he will spare himself the dangerously harsh discipline of the FARC.

There is no ethnic or religious segmentation in the country, not even a sharp territorial one⁴⁸, so any rational expected value calculation should imply avoiding the FARC and choosing any other alternative.

Second, as seen above, the socio-demographic composition of the FARC does not correspond to what Collier himself called his fundamental prediction. The percentage of women is high. The members of the FARC tend to be young, indeed, but they can hardly be called “unemployed”, even excluding all legal definitions⁴⁹. According to the evidence I have gathered from judicial proceedings, the vast majority of FARC members had a job *before* joining, and earned *above* the national average. Of course, this result does not come from a representative sample, but is nonetheless logical. After the mid 1980’s, the FARC strongholds have been cocoa growing regions, and/or rich in other natural resources (Vélez, 1999), so one would expect its peasants to be better off than the rest of the population.

In summary, a set of peasants –proportionally quite small, but not negligible—joins an organization that offers much worse material conditions than what they had previously, critically high levels of risk of losing their lives, severity and hardship. In particular, thousands of children join the FARC rather than other groups. Why do they ignore their material interests? Towards the risk of losing their own lives? Towards their basic quotidian liberties?

Organizational pull

The only way to understand the irrationality of those who join the FARC, the rationalist quandary is to consider both pull and push factors. Regarding the former, the recruitment strategy of an army-like illegal group *must* be different from the strategy of another kind of group –precisely at the very point in which the economic metaphor finds its limits. Big military organizations can hardly be built only on economic selective incentives. Armies intent on looting or plain mercenaries do not fight well, a fact well acknowledged by every admired military analyst from Machiavelli on, because a key feature of a good soldier is the capacity to choose the collective interests in life and death situations especially in defense, collective survival may depend on individual sacrifice (this is the core of the Constant analysis of Napoleonic wars, 1997). Conversely, the hubris of a vindictive warrior, the individualistic drive of a greedy type, or the discipline of a strictly presentist one, can be self-defeating as several episodes of the Colombian war (i.e., the Medellín militias, Jaramillo et. Al., 1998) clearly demonstrated. Warriors must be taught social values. Once again, this is not a normative but a rational, technical concern. The socialization of warriors regarding such values and routines has two dimensions. The leaders create a system of incentives that evolves through conscious or imperceptible adjustments organizations that make important discoveries, i.e., successful

technological innovators, take a bigger share of the entrants and are more able to mold them into efficient warriors. For example, the early discovery of the FARC of the importance of funneling the spoils of combat to the treasury of the organization (Alape, 1989), or the requirement of life militancy, increased its fire power and organizational cohesion. But at the same time, warriors are transformed by the very experience of war they create strong social ties, and develop a specific know how that teaches them that survival depends on the precision and adequacy of collective tasks.

So one part of the answer is that people who join, and remain inside the FARC do it, because the FARC actively recruits and tries to turn them into good soldiers. In contrast, the paramilitary offered much better economic incentives, and a real possibility of enrichment, but they never quite an army like force. It is not accidental that, despite the success of paramilitarism in Colombia as a social phenomenon, it was an organizational failure. But there is another part of the answer: socio-economic or idiosyncratic factors that push people into illegal groups. In a word, motivations.

Reasons for fighting

Motivations of recruits are the micro mechanisms that link social structures with preferences and decisions. They are variegated and can be quite complex. Several serious qualitative studies have identified through systematic eliciting of retired or active combatants some of the main ones. Despite the contextual differences, there is a wide area of intersection between them. For example, for Brett and Specht, 2005, and Honwana, 2006, the main push factors are poverty, lack of perspectives, vengeance, avoiding violence from the rival group, and the allure of the military life. Colombia is prone to this syndrome. In Table 1, 20% of the interviewed assert that

they were forced to join at gun point, but also the prestige of a military career, false economic promises, conviction, and vengeance play an important role (see also Gutiérrez, 2004).

With more than a bit of optimism, unwilling and double-crossed greedy recruits⁵⁰ account for almost half of the cases of Table 1. Does this revive –at least in part—Collier’s interpretation? Not necessarily. The problems surrounding the greedy interpretation are sticky, and appear at every level of the analysis. To see why, let us focus for a moment on a FARC member captured by the army who claims he was lured into the group because he thought he would improve his income. My salary before enlisting was 8,000 pesos a day, and the guerrilla promised me that I would earn between 300 and 400 000 pesos a month...In fact, that is why I joined [P2]. Suppose, reasonably enough that he wants to go on living, but he was captured after escaping a shooting in which the FARC suffered the worst casualties⁵¹. In the most simple form, then, his overall utility is a multiplicative function of the utility of his economic gains (E) and the losses he incurs in risking his own life. By the concavity of the utility function over the domain of normal gains, the utility improvement he expected had an upper bound: $E(300000)/E(240000) < 300000/240000 = 5/4$ (or $5/3$ if the denominator of the left hand side of the equation is 400 000 and not 300 000 pesos). This means that for him a very risky life is worth up to $4/5$ the value of a stable one⁵². In other words, a salary of 300000 will be preferred to one of 8 000 pesos a day only if our subject is almost completely unaware of the enormous danger of losing his life he incurs by entering the guerrilla behavior at odds with his instinct of preservation behavior and with minimally sensible assumptions about what one could call “biological rationality”.⁵³

Perhaps the strange behavior –from the point of view of the homo economicus-- of FARC recruits can be explained relaxing the assumption that fighters try to maximize a utility function.

In particular, there seems to be room for a very simple application of the well-known reference point effects (Kahneman and Tversky, 2000; Bateman and colleagues, 2000)⁵⁴. For the following explanation, it must be noted that: a) the cocoa production cycle is punctuated by boom and boost cycles (caused by both economic and political factors); and b) in certain regions being a member of an armed group (perhaps any one) is status-boosting. Now, suppose agent A, a cocoa grower, assesses outcomes on two parameters only, status and income. A is considering joining the FARC. She starts from a reference point x (where x_1 is a certain level of status and x_2 of income), and then the coca economy enters a crisis. If she chooses not to join the FARC, she will be transferred to point y , with the same social standing but less income (i.e., $y_1=x_1$, but $y_2<x_2$). Alternative z , joining the guerrilla, cuts her income to zero, but increases her status, that is, $z_1>x_1$ and $0=z_2<x_2$. Now, save extreme cases, the income decrease is so steep that it can not be offset by the status accretion; that is, in y A's utility is higher than in z . But, according to reference point effects –that predict that decisions will be “anchored” on the reference, the status quo ante-- A will not compare y and z , but x and y , on the one hand, and x and z , on the other. Now, point y is strictly dominated by x , while z is not y will be deleted by the domination criterion, and A will choose z even if income is more important than status to her.⁵⁵ Something similar can be said about incremented risk taking in the domain of losses, even if the agent exhibits the conventional risk adverse behavior in the domain of gains⁵⁶.

In summary, it can be reasonably asserted that comparative qualitative studies have shown that recruitment can not be reduced to coercion or greed, and needs to take into account social motivations. Please note that the discussion about the possible existence of a reference point effect had to introduce a social parameter. However, there remain two problems. First, as Lichbach (1995) cunningly has noted, given the ubiquity of grievances, for Gurr the problematic

is to explain why people *do not* rebel. Given the ubiquity of free riding, Olson's problematique in to explain why people *do* rebel.⁵⁷ Social explanations –perhaps mediated by cognitive effects—can tell why joining makes sense, but not why a small but not negligible minority joins while the rest refrain⁵⁸. This is a rather complicated and basically unsolved matter, which is beyond scope of this chapter. Second, it is not sufficient to identify motives in general. The next step is to pinpoint the peculiarities of the push factors of the main demographic categories that participate in war, and how the interface between those factors and organizational characteristics works. In particular, one would like to understand why child recruitment is much higher in the FARC than in the paramilitary.

The specifics of children

Actually, some specific child motivations have been described in depth, for example in the context of African conflicts (Richards, 1996; Skinner, 1999). What conjectures can be forwarded regarding the Colombian case? They include:

- a. Children (especially poor ones) are more vulnerable than adults, because their time horizons are short and their discount rates are higher⁵⁹.
- b. They have more reasons for escaping –(pre) adolescent rebellion against parental authority can prompt the decision of searching for illegal alternatives, that always exist when there is war (as Brett and Specht note). In the case of girls (Lara: 2000, 66), the decision may be much more strongly motivated, notably when sexual aggression (i.e., by the stepfather) is involved (Lara, 2000: 66).

These motives tend to go together. A small annoyance can trigger weighty decisions that do not take into account wins or losses in the [very] near future. In the midst of a fit of fury, family discipline or backwardness can appear so appalling that the only alternative is to leave. I decided [to join the guerrilla] on the spur of the moment, recognizes one child combatant (HRW, 2003: 55). Hundreds of adolescents, thus, seek in the guerrilla and the paramilitary an alternative

to the miseries of daily- family life. AMy father was always fighting with my mother and with us, too. That's why I went off with the guerrillas, to get away from the fighting. It was mainly because I was fed up at home (HWR, 2003: 49). Apparently this is frequent. FARC leaders find it necessary to warn recruits that their discipline is much more severe than that of a standard household, and that the guerrilla is no solution to petty personal problems (Ferro and Uribe, 2002). The general weakening of the structures of the traditional peasant society plays its role here.

As seen above, the benefits oriented, hard calculating type should refrain, or prefer the narcos and the paramilitary to the FARC or the ELN⁶⁰. Also there can be greedy-presentists, who are unable to postpone gratification, and who would pay very high costs tomorrow (their life) to have access to resources today. Actually, the violent and presentist youngster is a well know character in the Colombian war, and also in its literature and journalism (Salazar, 1990; 1993). When no strong organizational structure was there to harness the nihilistic tendencies that result from the combination of extremely high discount rates and the orientation towards immediate individual gratification, they run amok. This is precisely what happened to the (leftist) urban militias in Medellín, an overwhelmingly teenager force, whose members were guided by the motto “[there is] no future” (Salazar, 1990; Salazar, 1993; Jaramillo et. al., 1998).⁶¹ However, this type of fighter does not have a long useful life. The Darwinist advantage of the FARC is its capacity (indeed, its need) of transforming these motivations into warrior-like ones, which has a demonstration effect over new potential recruits.

- c. Wrong beliefs. As seen above, the FARC appears to foster wrong beliefs among some of its potential recruits with the hope of transforming them after they join. It may be the case that children are simply more gullible, or are not able to calculate the negative aspects of engaging in an (insurgent) military career. Children may also be

- more exposed to framing effects. In the case of the paramilitaries, they promise salaries and they deliver, but still the recruit may hold wrong beliefs (for example, turning a blind eye to the worst aspects of the military life that awaits them). Additionally, minors are incorporated preferably to the peripheral networks because the paramilitaries lack the Napoleonic drive of the guerrillas.
- d. Peer – non peer pressure. Human Rights Watch correctly asserts that in Colombia enlistment in the guerrilla is NOT forced. “The great majority of child recruits to the irregular forces decide to join voluntarily” (HWR, 2003: 24). There are, however, two major sources of pressure on minors. First, the sheer asymmetry between the group and the child. Adults, after all, can choose to run away⁶²; children are much less mobile. Second, peer pressure (especially strong when the peer is kin), which goes hand in hand with a degree of territorial segmentation. Children tend to join the group that is available in the here and now (Brett and Specht, 2005), but it is noteworthy that in the Colombian case there are long periods in which adversaries overlap territorially.
 - e. Adulthood craving and social advancement. In many peasant societies, membership in an armed organization offers status and the possibility of upward social mobility. For children, this has an added meaning: joining the group is an explicit recognition of their status of adults. In their posterior recollections, many ex-combatants recognize that they learnt how to obey, but also how to command, an experience that their parents might never have experienced. More obliquely, life in a guerrilla may provide for extended Acapacity training and education, an aspect that many combatants (particularly the young and the female) consider extremely valuable. An army-like structure can offer more of this than a loose federation of local Dons.

Conclusions

Recruits are carriers of a mix of motivations, motivated by many factors including, proximity, vengeance, fear, family conflicts, coveting local power and visibility. It would be rather pedantic to assume those themes as inevitably non-political; they can constitute the

intersection between story and history, between personal trajectories and big processes. The key to understand their potential political valence is that they are not activated until an organization does not come up with an ecumenical story that allows individuals to spell out their individual concerns in a universalistic idiom. But such concerns need not coincide with the organization's objective. To transform raw recruits into useful fighters, illegal armies promote preference transformations through ideology and/or socialization in key experiences. Each organization forms different types of fighters. Loyalty grows with length of service. The original motivations of the fighters are changed generally; the reasons to join are quite different from the reasons to remain. Translated into rationalistic slang, this means that each fighter has two distinct utility functions⁶³. The second one depends crucially on the type of organization. For the practical personnel engaged in reinsertion processes, it is important to be aware that the children recruited from group X will be very different than those from group Y.

Tables

Table 1 - Basic data of the *desmovilizados* up to 2002 (N=316)

Membership	FARC-EP, 83%
Age	Between 13 and 17 years: 44%. 17 years or more: 56%. 82% joined the guerrilla between 10 and 17 years
Gender	92% male
Studies	84% did not complete primary studies. 8% no formal schooling at all. 8% incomplete secondary studies
Marital status	88% unmarried
Reason for joining the guerrilla	Forced recruitment, 20%; the allure of weapons and uniforms, 20%; false promises (salary, good treatment), 16%; belief in the cause, 12%; fear or vengeance (regarding the Army or the paramilitaries), 10%
Reasons for leaving the guerrilla	Ill treatment (37%); lack of salary (19%); lack of freedom, 17%; false promises, 16%

Source: Pinto and et al. 2002, p. 8 and ss

Table 2 Colombian illegal armed groups

Name	Acronym	Characteristics
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Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia	FARC	1964-?, started as a force related to the pro-Soviet communist party, by the late 80s and early 90s became totally independent. Presently has between 13,000 and 20,000 members
Ejército de Liberación Nacional	ELN	1966. Castroist organization was almost completely destroyed in 1973 but came back to life in the 1980s. Presently it has fewer than 5,000 members
Movimiento 19 de Abril	M-19	1973-1991. Nationalist-populist. It stroke a peace agreement with the government and became a successful political party
Ejército Popular de Liberación	EPL	1966-? Started as a Maoist force, in 1991 it made a peace agreement, but was crushed by the FARC. Some of its remainders have maintained certain armed activity (completely dependent from the FARC) until today
Paramilitaries-self defences	Several; the main denomination is the AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia)	Begun in the early 1980s as an antsubversive force. Some of these death squads developed into big regional

		organizations. In the late 1990s a national federation was built, but did not last long. In 2002 began a peace process
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Table 3 -- Comparison between the FARC, the ELN and the paramilitaries

Criterion	FARC	ELN	Paramilitaries
Structure	Centralized	Federalized	Localistic
Incentives (1)- Paying	Very seldom	Very seldom	Yes
Incentives (2) - Access to individual benefits	No	No	Yes
Incentives (3) – Relation with civil society	Low	Medium	Strongly integrated
External Risk	High	High	Low-medium
Recruitment	Mainly but not only voluntary, provision of both genuine and false information	With some exceptions, voluntary	A combination of voluntary and forced, depending on the region
Exit	Death or desertion	Death, desertion, negotiation	Death, desertion, negotiation
Discipline	Very severe	Medium-low	Medium-low, but with high internal risk
Ideology	“Organizational culture”	Christian militancy	Self-defence

Table 4 - Probability of being violently killed for a guerrilla member and a average Colombian citizen

Year	Guerrilla members	Average citizens
1995	4.81%	0.07
1996	5.61	0.07
1997	5.44	0.06
1998	4.76	0.06
1999	4.82	0.06
2000	4.45	0.06

Source: Pinto, Vergara, LaHuerta, 2002, p. 9

Table 5 – Characteristics of children in the ICBF database. N=2110,1999-2004⁶⁴

Mean age of entry in the armed group (in years)	15.97
Gender	72% male, 28% female

Table 6 – Membership and differences according to the ICBF database

Membership distribution in the database	FARC, 1115; ELN, 271; ERP, 16; ERG, 6; EPL, 17; Paramilitary (AUC+ACC), 607
Entry age	FARC, 15.93; Paramilitary, 16.15; ELN, 15.85
Education level (in years)	FARC, 3.9; ELN, 4; Paramilitary, 5.22
Gender	FARC, 33.68%; ELN, 32.47%; Paramilitary, 14.66%. Differences between both guerrillas and paramilitary significant at 0.01 level

Notes

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- ¹ Other candidates can be easily found: social and familial networks, for example.
- ² At least to my knowledge.
- ³ For a systematic discussion of the subject from the experimental point of view, see Gates and NEED NAME HERE in this volume. As the authors note, experiments do not provide an exhaustive set of answers in this field, because there might be big differences with real life situations.
- ⁴ That is why, for example, they are not entitled to vote. This is a crucial point because in the history of building of citizenship, universal male suffrage and soldiering were more or less parallel and mirror processes.
- ⁵ Machiavelli (1991) stressed that *any* recruitment had an element of coercion, and I would conjecture that it grows in direct proportion with the degree of asymmetry between the recruiter and the candidate. In this sense, even the most enthusiastic adhesion of an 8-year old may be highly coercive.
- ⁶ Indeed, there is a whole range of game theory (evolutionary) that models the interaction of abstract agents, without assuming conscience or even any sort of mental activity. But it is unclear how its tools could be applied here (besides time spans are too short, etc.).
- ⁷ And, I suspect, to many other countries.
- ⁸ The exclusive or between army of rent seeker is another flawed Collier dichotomy.
- ⁹ With the caveats discussed above.
- ¹⁰ Who can be targeted by rival groups.
- ¹¹ The massive presence of minors in the British army.
- ¹² With the caveats reported above.
- ¹³ And both share some characteristics: for example, they are agrarian confrontations.
- ¹⁴ The debate about the point continues today.
- ¹⁵ Responding to the known Maoist dictum that the guerrilla must act within the masses as a fish in the water.
- ¹⁶ The ELN was extremely brutal, but recruitment was voluntary.
- ¹⁷ Compared to other irregular groups, the participation of the ELN in the narco-economy has been rather restrained.
- ¹⁸ At the height of the movement the ELN may have had 5000 members
- ¹⁹ Liberal with capital L meaning: member of the Liberal party.
- ²⁰ “Here...there are many guerrillas that are born fighters (“peposos”-they like action), they are not afraid of the enemy...Since they were children they fought against our enemy” (Arenas, w.d.: 96). There were also women combatants, and Arenas –who was the main ideologue of the FARC until he passed away—reports the death of one.
- ²¹ Gutiérrez, in preparation.
- ²² This is FARC’s basic operational unit.
- ²³ El Tiempo 3 de enero de 2001, pág. 3. “In the context of Berlin Operation, 38 uninterrupted days of combat have been completed in Soatá, Santander...120 guerrillas deserted, among them 45

children. The FARC secretariat invested a billion pesos [approximately 500 thousand dollars] in this offensive, that tried to link the South and the North of the country”.

²⁴ The example is more remarkable considering that women were not given the right to vote until 1957.

²⁵ Which have been overcome by technical development. I imagine it is much easier to carry and manipulate an AK-47 than a musket.

²⁶ The child may develop a knack for military activities, or the risk he incurs in by supporting the guerrilla may become so high that the only way to avoid it is to flee, or both.

²⁷ This means, by the way, that, contrary to standard analyses, they have at least two utility functions: one before and one after joining. When the transformation process is successful they can be very different.

²⁸ More than 70% of the population lives in cities.

²⁹ In this terrain there is a wide disagreement between the figures of the government and the NGO's; the criteria and methods that they use are very different.

³⁰ ICBF is the Spanish acronym for Colombian Institute of Family Welfare. It is in charge of family and childhood problems. The database I am referring to is an extraordinary source of information; it gathers the essential characteristics of child combatants that join the ICBF reinsertion program from 1999 on. Though not a representative sample, it is sufficiently big as to offer a good entry point to the universe of socio-economic traits of Colombian underage fighters. Table 5 describes it.

³¹ Two reinserted boys said they had been recruited at 11.

³² And possibly even more important than it for social inclusion.

³³ Please note that regarding gender the problem is quite different. In the FARC women fight on a par with men, and the fact of having so many females in the organization provides a precious cement to the organization, through in-organization mating.

³⁴ Probably the Ugandan Lord's Army has completely different reasons for hunting children.

³⁵ Nothing of the sort appears in the case of women.

³⁶ The Berlin operation was so publicized precisely because it was a rather extraordinary event. On the other hand, the age average of the FARC remains quite low (Gutiérrez, 2006).

³⁷ This draws on Gutiérrez, 2006, which indulges in a detailed organizational analysis. I base the discussion on judicial proceedings, oral testimonies, field research, governmental reports, autobiographies, and literature about the Colombian conflict.

³⁸ The exception is when somebody is sent for a special mission—for example, terrorist—to the city. This happens very seldom, if ever, in the life of a fighter.

³⁹ I.e., looting for individual purposes and without the authorization of the immediate superior.

⁴⁰ Anybody familiar with the military experience knows that it promotes extremely strong emotional ties. During combat soldiers put their lives in the hands of their comrades and superiors

⁴¹ Since there is a quantitative asymmetry, men complain when women find an extra-organizational mate. “Why should they look for men outside, if they have so much to choose here?” (Ferro and Uribe, 2002).

⁴² For any army, but especially an irregular one with its weak control mechanisms), having unhappy soldiers is very dangerous. During battle they can shoot their officers in the back.

⁴³ The ELN relies much more in “simple” support or at least benevolent neutrality.

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- ⁴⁴ The rules of the game are different in the militias, but from now on I will concentrate on the FARC proper.
- ⁴⁵ The standard practice is that each fighter finally gets his/her gifts, but there is no guarantee.
- ⁴⁶ There appears to be quantitative evidence that supports this assertion, but I do not elaborate on this here.
- ⁴⁷ My own count, from a data base of political homicides from 1975 to 2002 built in the course of our research, gives a far worse ratio for the guerrilla: 1:2,5.
- ⁴⁸ Geographical barriers will not prevent people intent on joining an illegal force from doing so. In reality, these barriers are not so strong. The FARC almost always coexists with other warlords and narcotraffickers. As the ICBF database reveals, departments like Antioquia, Guaviare and Meta are a source of recruits for both the guerrillas and the paramilitary; surely also for the narcos.
- ⁴⁹ No country counts minors as unemployed, because in theory they have not entered the labor market yet.
- ⁵⁰ That perhaps expected a salary but did not receive one.
- ⁵¹ And the precondition of maximizing utility is being alive.
- ⁵² Here “risky” means having 70 times higher probability of being shot.
- ⁵³ Kalyvas 2006 suggests that, after certain level of conflict intensity, survival overrides any other motivation.
- ⁵⁴ Of course, recruitment is full of examples of another key Tversky effect, framing. As Kannehaman and Tversky warn, extrapolation from experimental results to daily life is produces frequent errors.
- ⁵⁵ And then purely greedy agent B, who cares nothing about status, would be less prone to join the FARC. The high risk population would be constituted by people with material *and* other interests.
- ⁵⁶ Risks for non-joiners in guerrilla influenced regions can be: aerial fumigation of their crops, armed attacks by the guerrilla and/or its adversaries, economic crises, general insecurity due to lack of social and state regulations.
- ⁵⁷ Though the alternative need not be so strong as Lichbach states. As Wood (2003: 254) notes, the study of intrinsic, other regarding process-based and endogenous preferences may be as important to explaining quiescence as it apparently is in explaining insurgent collective action. Indeed, it is frequent that the same forces that fuel war bound it.
- ⁵⁸ The same, of course, can be said of strictly economic explanations.
- ⁵⁹ Incidentally, there are some marvelous descriptions of this effect in Tolstoy’s “War and peace”.
- ⁶⁰ Many oral testimonies by the paramilitary suggest that guerrilla deserters join the ranks of their former foes because they are searching better economic horizons, and sometimes more individual elbow room. “Here he can choose the color of his shirt”, claimed one paramilitary member about an ex-guerrilla that was now his comrade.

⁶¹ Inversely, non joiners may be characterized by longer time horizons, more risk aversion and lower discount rates, which may act as a brake even in unfavorable conditions.

⁶² And they do so, not only when they are threatened personally but also when they fear that their children will be recruited.

⁶³ The one person-one utility function would be a particular case, when $U_{t0}=U_{t1}$.

⁶⁴ The flow of reinserted minors that appear in the base is the following: 10 in 1999, 98 in 2000, 197 in 2001, 395 in 2002, 726 in 2003, 684 in 2004